

# GAME-BAG & CREEL

BY

W. G. M. DOBIE



*Illustrated from Water Colour Drawings and Pen-and-Ink  
Sketches by Vincent Balfour-Browne*

Price **5/-** Net





DANIELS



In memory of a very pleasant  
Easter spent in the Highlands

from Jim

Obar. April 6<sup>th</sup> 1931.







GAME-BAG AND CREEL



















THE CORRIE WHERE HE FELL  
“*The Stag's Revenge*” (*Page Eighteen*)



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*Made in Great Britain.*



To  
CHARLES BREWSTER MACPHERSON  
OF BALAVIL

In gratitude for happy days  
That have been mine, with dog and gun,  
On moors with heather-bloom ablaze  
Under a kindly August sun ;  
For late Septembers on the hill  
Among the corries high and bare ;  
For teaching how and what to kill  
And (harder lesson!) what to spare ;  
For heavy creel and well-filled bag,  
And for such fragments of the lore  
Of trout and salmon, grouse and stag,  
As I have gathered from your store,  
I send to you this book of rhyme  
To while away an hour or so,  
Before the fire, in winter time,  
When Badenoch glens are deep with snow.







## NOTE

*My thanks are due to Mr Vincent Balfour-Browne for allowing me to use here his two drawings which are reproduced in colour, and for executing the delightful sketches appearing in this book.*

*Certain of the verses in the following pages were published first in "The Field," "Country Life," "The Scottish Field," "Chambers's Journal," "The Scots Law Times," "The Glasgow Herald," "The Dumfries Courier and Herald," and "The Gallovidian." I wish to acknowledge the courtesy of the Editors of these magazines and newspapers in permitting reproduction.*

*W. G. M. D.*







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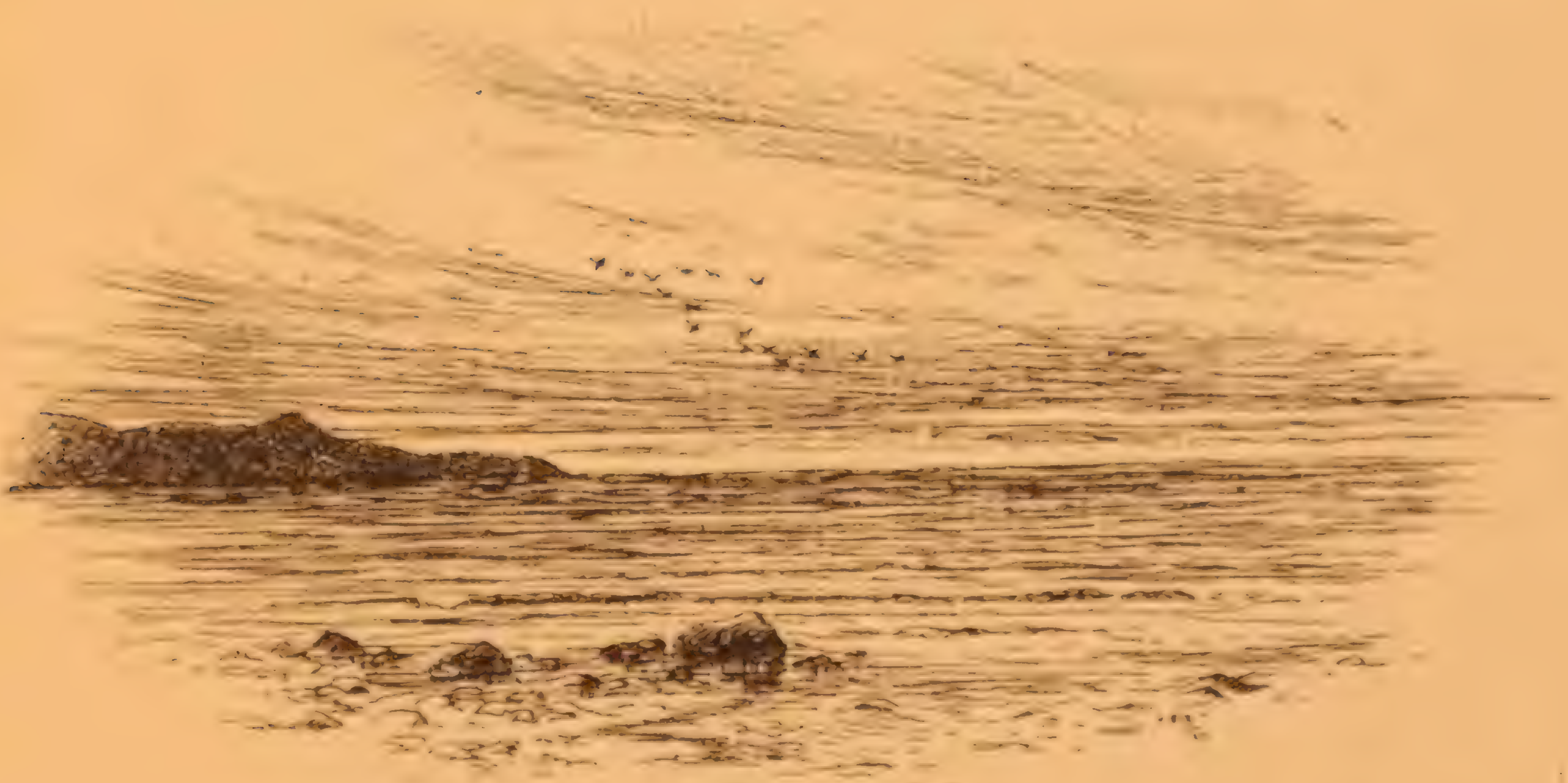
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## FLIGHTING

HAD I not seen, against the glowing light  
Of dusk, a wedge of wild geese in their flight,  
And heard their clamour—Ah, that magic cry !  
Clear in the frosty stillness, haply I  
Had settled in the fireside chair, intent  
On musty tomes of legal precedent.

But now there comes and comes and comes to me  
The crooning and the murmur of the sea,  
An hour before the dawn, at flighting time,—  
A winter dawn—my greatcoat white with rime—  
When, crouching low behind the grey sea-wall,  
I waited for the geese, and heard their call.





## THE TROUT FISHER

HIGH overhead green branches meet  
'Twixt banks of scented meadow-sweet :  
Through leafy tunnels, shady, cool,  
He wanders slow from pool to pool,  
And lightly, lightly throws his flies  
Where lazily the great trout rise.

And in a happy Summer dream  
All things combine,—the gurgling stream  
With flecks of foam that dance and float,  
The insects' hum, the song birds' note,  
The plunging trout, the whirring reel,  
The bending rod, the heavy creel.

So evening finds him still intent  
Until the day's last gleam is spent ;  
Then, tackle packed and pipe well lit,  
He strikes the path and follows it  
Through valley, field and woodland way  
And gloaming's magic mystery.



## OFF THE CHAIN

A jolly day, a "poaching" day,  
When *Flash* and I went out to slay  
Whatever fate should send our way,  
Of fur or feather :

We crossed the stubbles bare and trim,  
And finished in the twilight dim  
Beyond the moorland's utmost rim  
Among the heather.

No programme fixed, no rigid plan—  
A holiday for dog and man  
'Mid mountains, moors, and burns that ran  
With gurgling laughter :  
Could one ask more ?—a purple hill  
With blackcock, grouse and hares to kill,  
And happy memories to fill  
The dark days after.





## HEREAFTER

Do salmon run in Lethe, as they run in Dee and Don ?  
Are there depths and rippling stretches on the Styx and Acheron ?  
Does Charon issue tickets and enforce the local rules ?  
Has the Angling Club of Hades got a lease of all the pools ?  
If a fellow, for his sins, is into dire perdition hurled,  
Can he rent some decent fishing in the dim, dark underworld ?



## ON A DISTANT PROSPECT OF A CELLAR

I'm poor, alas ! Not that I'd greatly care  
To emulate Carnegie or Rockefeller,  
But I *would* have—elsewhere than “in the air”—  
A moderately large and well-stocked cellar ;  
So homing guests would say, “The lucky sinner,—  
What Burgundy !—What whisky !—What a dinner ! ”

It worries one, it moves one e'en to tears,  
To watch a monster, reeking of the dollar,  
Pour the bright glories of the vintage years  
Through his tight-fitting and distended collar ;  
A wretch whose wines don't make his feast, but mar it,  
A ghoul who gulps his sherry and his claret.

Fortune, the fickle jade, in jesting mood,  
Bestows on him—that source of irritation—  
The means whereby, with choicest wine and food,  
To swell his all too obvious inflation ;  
But damns me with—hence these abysmal yearnings—  
A hospitable soul, a lawyer's earnings.



## OLD HARVEST SONG

We have tramped behind the straining team that drew  
the creaking plough,

We have sown the seed when Spring was here, and see our  
harvest now !

How the sun that glitters coldly through the frost of  
Autumn morn

Gilds the wheat sheaves on the hillsides and the valleys  
rich with corn !

Not in vain, not in vain have we sown the golden grain,  
The harvest crowns the valley slopes and rustles on the  
plain.

When the sun dips o'er the hilltops, then beneath the  
harvest moon

Ye shall see the sickles gleaming, ye shall hear the gleaners'  
tune,

Till the last corn-sheaf is gathered and the heavy-laden  
wain

Through the grey mists of the valley rumbles on the  
homeward lane :

Not in vain, not in vain have we sown the golden grain,  
The harvest crowns the valley slopes and rustles on the  
plain.





## THE MONSTER OF THE POOL

DEEP pool, flecked with foam, I your lover  
Return now that April is here ;  
What secrets am I to discover ?  
What trout will you yield me this year ?  
The monster that broke me last Autumn  
When the net and the creel loomed so near ?  
Is he lurking—that hoary old sinner—  
Far down in your dark shadows still ?  
Will he rise to an Olive Red Spinner ?  
To a Greenwell's ?—a Dun ?—a Blue Quill ?  
Would a Black Gnat appeal to his palate ?  
Is there any fly tied that will kill ?  
Or perhaps when the high rooks are homing,  
And the heat of a June day is past,  
Will he lazily rise in the gloaming,—  
Fight the last of his battles at last,—  
Firmly held on a Sedge or a Coachman  
At the end of a gossamer cast ?



## THE STAG'S REVENGE

He looks at me, down from my study wall,  
With head erect and branching antlers tall :  
I close my book, and gladly see again  
A lonely Highland glen.

Ben Attow's peak against the sunset cold,  
Loch Affrick's waters, gleaming into gold ;  
And, near Mam Soul's giant summit, known so well,  
The corrie where he fell.

I live again that bright September day,—  
The spy, the stalk, the shot, the ecstasy,  
The long tramp home in slowly fading light,  
The fire of logs at night.

The stag looks down. Weary, I turn from him  
To this disputed claim for *legitim*,  
And—stiffer than the steepest Highland hills—  
McLaren's tomes on " Wills " !



## I SIT AND SNEEZE

I sit and sneeze where others snooze ;  
Although the Club is warm, I freeze ;  
Concealed behind the *Evening News*,  
I sit and sneeze.

Thus constantly to cough and wheeze  
Doth play the devil with my Muse,—  
A fickle lady, hard to please.

My sympathetic friends say, "Choose,—  
Rum or hot whisky with a squeeze  
Of lemon."—And I don't refuse.  
I sit and sneeze.



ON A FAVOURITE TERRIER,  
KILLED BY A MOTORIST

For just a moment stop and listen. Hark !  
Did not you hear a joyous, welcome bark ?  
At dusk I sometimes fancy that I see  
A kindly little ghost that follows me.

How gladly would I have him hanged or shot,—  
That blind, fat fool who drove the Juggernaut !



# ADDRESS TO A GREY HEN

*Slain on 12th August.*

You thrice accursed bird, abhorr'd grey hen,  
Who hurtle earthward from an August sky,  
When grouse, unscathed, in packs of eight and ten,  
Swing past my butt, why do you choose to die ?  
Or, if 'tis writ by Fate that this should be,  
Why does your carcass thus descend on me ?  
"I am afraid to think what I have done,  
Look on't again I dare not"—but I know  
Your death will prove a source of ribald fun,  
Unseemly jest and conversation low :  
Yea, men who have the brains of a cuckoo  
Will blossom into wits, on seeing you.  
A keeper picks you up with anxious care,  
That all the world may witness where you died :  
When lunch is spread, he finds a hillock bare  
On which to lay your bleeding corpse aside :  
And now, you blasted fowl, I'll get it hot ;  
Alas ! 'twas I, poor worm, who fired the shot.





## SEPTEMBER

SEPTEMBER brings the rustling yellow sheaves,  
The bracken brown and dead,  
The hanging hazels and the fading leaves,  
The rowan-berries red.

Pale is the sunset now, and pale the dawn,  
Their summer splendour lost :  
The morning air is biting, and the lawn  
Gleams white with autumn frost.



## THE COMMUNIST ORATOR

"THE scum of all the earth"—so you design  
The men of Britain's "far-flung battle line":  
And they who heard the bugle and the drum,  
And gave their lives,—were they, then, also "scum"?

You mangy little pup with bandy legs,  
Thank God, there *was* some "scum,"—to hide the dregs!



## LINES TO H.M. INSPECTOR OF TAXES

*(On receiving an Invitation to call at his Office.)*

"ALL men are liars !"—So in haste you spake,  
 And time has not induced a change of view :  
 Thus, having found mankind too prone to fake  
 Returns, you deem that I'm a liar too :  
 You spurn with scorn my statement of net profit,—  
 You don't appreciate the pathos of it.

You send me sheaves of forms, per parcel post,  
 I fill them in, for better or for worse,  
 Return them, in a month or two at most,—  
 Forms that would make a Pilgrim Father curse :  
 At last, with great expense of mental tissue,  
 I've filled up every schedule you can issue.

You seek a meeting now : you think I'll walk  
 Into your parlour, a proverbial fly :  
 But no ! If you desire that we should talk,  
 We'll take a stroll together, you and I,  
 Some evening dark. The path that I propose  
 Leads by the willows, where the river flows.



## THE DUFFER

I WONDER why one ever tries  
To shoot a pheasant when it flies :  
They are so much more easily hit  
When leisurely they walk, or sit ;  
While shooting pheasants as they run  
Is, to my mind, tremendous fun.

So to my host I'll go, and say—  
“ You may have noticed, sir, to-day  
I haven't hit a single thing  
Which, so to speak, was on the wing :  
Two beaters and your nephew are  
The only birds that bear a scar.

“ Permit me then to go at morn  
To where your keepers scatter corn :  
There, fully armed, I'll lie in wait  
Concealed behind a wall or gate :  
Not sportsmanlike ?—What utter rot !  
Why, you get *two* at every shot ! ”





## PART SONG

Doctor and Lawyer  
(together) { It has often seemed to us  
Strange and even ludicrous,—  
Yes, we cannot understand  
why it should be

Doctor : That the people of this town  
Come to me when they're "run  
down,"

Lawyer : But to get "wound up" they  
always come to me.



## DUSK ON THE MARSHES

SEA air's keen air, just before the dark :  
You shiver in a reed-bed, listening—Hark !  
Far calls, quick wings whistling down the wind,—  
Then a fat duck thudding on the ground behind.

Sheldrake, teal drake, widgeon,—all  
Streak across the black sky—pass or fall :  
Load, then ! Fire, then ! Every fowler knows  
Every second's precious till the last gleam goes.

The farmer to his furrows, the cobbler to his last,  
I to dusty tittle-deeds, the gun laid past :  
But I'm longing for the marshes in the dim half-light,  
Where a salt wind's blowing and the sea birds flight.





## *DE MINIMIS*

WHEN, diligent, in days gone by  
You studied Erskine, Hume, and Stair,  
Did you imagine you'd apply  
The principles embodied there ?  
And did you hope that, soon or late,  
For fees substantial you would bring  
Your bright mind to illuminate  
Dark problems of Conveyancing ?

Alas ! You have already found—  
A not unknown experience—  
That wealthy clients don't abound,  
And little clients bring the pence :  
When day by day they come to you  
With small-debt claims, your soul to vex,  
You wonder, Was it ever true ?—  
*De minimis non curat lex.*



AND BLACKCOCK—ONE, IF YOU CAN FIND IT !

*"Anticipation" (Page Twenty Nine)*















## ANTICIPATION

I OCCUPY no country seat,  
No keepers wait me at my portals ;  
My coverts don't take long to beat,  
Nor am I one of those immortals  
Who, photographed upon a moor,  
In shooting tweeds and baggy breeches,  
Delight to give the idle poor  
A glimpse of what the idle rich is.

The bags I wear, the bags I kill  
Are not, alas, of such dimensions  
As to attract the Press ; but still  
I rent a moor with no pretensions,  
Bleak, lonely, wild. A hill-tarn blue  
Reflects the rugged rocks behind it,  
Where there are grouse—a very few ;  
And blackcock—one, if you can find it !

But *Flash* does not regret, I know,  
That birds are scarce and prone to running ;  
It's but a better chance to show  
Her doggy wisdom and her cunning :  
She whimpers in her sleep to-night,—  
She sees, in dreams, the first grouse falling,  
And, through the heather, out of sight,  
Hears, as I hear, the old cocks calling.



## UNTO CÆSAR

*(During the General Strike of 1926, a Mr Smith signed "permits" which were issued to those desirous of using the highways without molestation.)*

I BESEECH you, O Dictator,  
That a blue perambulator,  
And the child and comely nurse who go therewith,  
Be permitted, greatly daring,  
To enjoy their usual airing  
On the roadway that meanders by the Nith.  
You'll admit, it would be hard on  
Them, who in those former days  
(When such roadways were—your pardon !  
Mentioned as "the King's highways"),  
Unmolested, unrestricted,  
Had a daily outing there,  
Were they harshly interdicted  
From the scenery and air :  
You are just (we would not wrong you)  
Unto us, our kin and kith,—  
Though we *know* the roads belong to  
Mr Smith.



## DE PROFUNDIS

IN early days with youthful zeal I slew  
The partridge and the pheasant—oft a runner  
But later was instructed to pursue  
Figures Teutonic, as a Lewis gunner :  
Thus rapid fire, though useful while the nation  
Was still at war, acquired a fascination :

A fatal fascination, for when I  
Handle a rifle now, the devil's in it ;  
I charge the magazine, and swift let fly  
Its whole contents at thirty rounds a minute :  
My stalker knew not this : he is acquitted  
Of all *mens rea* in the crimes committed.

We spied a herd of deer far up the glen ;  
We tramped, we climbed, we crawled, took careful cover :  
Never did fox more neatly stalk a hen,  
Or Neolithic man a rival lover :  
Into my trembling grasp was thrust a Mauser,—  
I heard the words “A Royal !—Take him now, sir !”

I took him not. Alas ! I took his wife,  
I took his sons, I took the whole connection :  
Their lord and master wisely saved his life  
By flight through volleys fired in his direction ;  
I—base assassin, murderer, unhanged robber—  
Killed two old hinds, three calves, and one small nobber.



## THE PLOUGHMAN

A BOY, he saw the city's distant glow  
Against the evening sky :  
He stood upon the bridge ; he heard below  
The engine thunder by ;  
His heart went with it, and he yearned to go ;  
He caught the great world's cry.

In dreams he saw the wonders of Cathay,  
And many an Eastern shore :  
He saw the deep Atlantic rise in spray,  
He heard its breakers roar ;  
The unknown called him, beckoned him away,  
To wander, to explore.

An old man tills the headlands, haugh and howe :  
Want, poverty, despair  
Have crushed his boyish dreams and fancies : now  
His head is bent with care,  
For Age has come, and found him at the plough,  
And Death will find him there.



## THE NEW LAIRD

You bought the ground, the grey old lodge, and paid for  
them in cash ;

Their owner fought and died abroad—but you did nothing  
rash ;

He added glory to his name : you earned an O.B.E. :

And he was making history, while you made £. s. d.

You pack the covert side with friends, each friend a  
profiteer ;

The keepers smile—a sickly smile—and stand well to the  
rear ;

And beaters who, some years ago, were blithely chasing  
Huns,

Grow pale with fear whene'er the line is drawing near the  
guns.

I loathe your pomp, your dozen cars, your brand-new  
carriage road ;

You thought, "the place was 'ardly like a gentleman's  
abode" :

*His* folk were gentlemen when yours, with gibberings and  
wails,

Swung from primeval forest boughs by their prehensile tails.

It may be that, rememb'ring him, I'm hard on you : I am

Forgetful of the sudden change to this from—selling jam :

But keep it up ! Perhaps, one day, a "gentleman" you'll  
be.

. . . . .  
A very gallant gentleman was slain in Picardy.



## SONG AFTER "SEA FEVER"

ALTHOUGH I'm clad as a sailor lad  
I wish it clearly stated,  
That the sea is a thing I can't abide—  
A sentiment shared by the works inside—  
And I know that "the call of the running tide"  
Has been mightily over-rated.

When I "go down to the sea," I drown  
Not once and all together :  
By disintegration sure and slow  
Down to the dark green depths I go,  
If the wind "like a whetted knife" doth blow,  
And it's moderate dirty weather.

For my yachtsman's kit, I must admit,  
I have not paid my tailor :  
So thus it is—although life is dear—  
In "the whale's way" still I persevere :  
And that's why you're called upon to hear  
This song of a sea-sick sailor.



## CHARLES ST. JOHN'S "WILD SPORTS OF THE HIGHLANDS"

SOME books may be more witty, some more wise,  
But none there is that holds so fast the key  
To that dear-loved and magic land that lies  
Betwixt the mountains and the grey North Sea :  
So, on a winter evening, when the rain  
Beats down, and loosened creepers lash the pane,

No more I ask than this,—a crackling fire,  
These pages, and a seasoned pipe to fill.  
With gun and dog, with feet that never tire,  
I tramp on moor and mountain-side, until  
The storm's dull thunder mingles with the roar  
Of "muckle harts" in corries of Benmore.





## THE DESPERATE BATTLE

ALL day by office hours I must  
Play at the lawyer, dry as dust :  
When welcome evening falls, then I  
Become a charger, mounted by  
A laughing, golden-headed lad,  
A doughty knight, pyjama-clad.

He routs an army in the hall  
And slays their chief, a warrior tall :  
Upstairs the fighting rages still,  
Each step defended grimly, till  
Their broken cavalry have fled,  
And, battle-worn, he rides to bed.

Aye, through that press of men he rides,  
And fiercely stabs my heaving sides  
With heels which, luckily for me,  
Unlike a knight's, unrowelled be :  
High waves above the deadly strife  
His dripping sword,—a paper knife.



## IN REPLY TO AN INVITATION

"COME now ! The forest's full of deer,"  
You write. I see the morning mist  
Draw up the hillsides, leaving clear  
Mountains of blue and amethyst ;  
The narrow pony-track that winds  
Through passes where I long to go ;  
The stags among the watchful hinds,  
The lonely corries touched with snow ;  
Each brawling burn, each glen, each height,  
Each fringe of birch and rowan wood :  
"The forest's full of deer," you write,  
And "Come at once !" Ah, if I could !



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